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How Russia's moles use the UN

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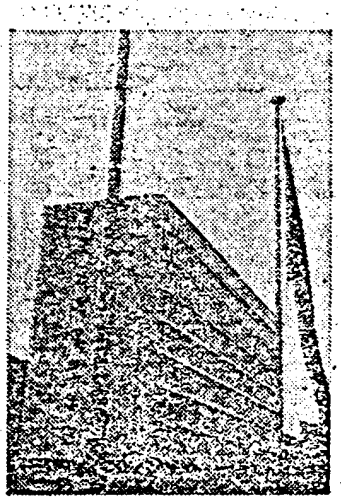
THROUGHOUT this month, the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation of the United Nations (Unesco for short) is meeting in plenary session in Belgrade — supposedly devoting itself solely to "promoting collaboration among nations . . . in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for human rights and fundamental freedoms." However hard the majority of its 144 members may strive to live up to these provisions of the 1945 Charter, there is one group of signatories—the East European bloc, headed by the Soviet Union—which tramples on the Charter and treats Unesco, like other UN agencies, primarily as a platform for intelligence operations.

It is estimated that 23 out of the 72 Soviet officials who work permanently in Unesco are full-time officials of the KGB or its military intelligence counterpart, the GRU. This proportion of about one in three is matched in the various UN agencies based in Geneva, where no fewer than 133 of the 419 Soviet permanent staff are thought to be intelligence officers. Even the so-called straightforward officials are all co-opted in some way or another to help in the business of intelligence gathering and the recruitment of likely contacts. They are indeed told quite firmly on arrival that their performance will be judged in Moscow on their work for the Soviet Mission in these respects and that their duties as UN officials are of relatively minor importance. The subject of loyalty to the United Nations is not even raised, except to be shot down. And the irony is that this army of spies is paid for largely out of the agencies' budgets (some £50 million a year in the case of Unesco), which means, in turn, that it is being largely financed by the Western taxpayer.

The extent of the KGB penetration of Unesco, which maintains a vast international staff some 3,500 strong, was highlighted by the trial in Paris last May of the 70-year-old Charles Pathé (son of the pioneer French film producer) on charges of disseminating Soviet "disinformation" for money over a period of 20 years. The trial on this rare and controversial charge ended with a conviction and a five-year prison sentence from a French court—which showed that, among the Nato powers, France, at any rate, had fully woken up to the dangers posed by Moscow's elaborate and long-standing campaign to manipulate Western public opinion. But equally significant about the Pathé case was the way it had been run from the Soviet end. He had finally been arrested after long surveillance while in the act of handing over his material at a café, "Au rendez-vous des amis," in the Place Gambetta (a few minutes before, French security officials had followed him into a public urinal nearby, only to discover that their quarry was merely satisfying the urge of nature); and the agent seized with him, Igor Alexandrovitch Kuznetsov, was a Second Secretary in the Soviet permanent delegation to Unesco.



Unesco's building in Paris: a fruitful field for the KGB.

Kuznetsov was by no means the first Soviet "case officer" who had manipulated Pathé from Unesco's plush headquarters in the Place de Fontenoy. He had first been spotted as a likely recruit 22 years before by Viktor Mikheyev, a KGB officer posing as head of the Translation Section of Unesco's Secretariat. After a spell under Eduard Yakovlev of the Soviet delegation, he was then "handled" for 10 years by a succession of three KGB officers working out of the Soviet Embassy (which is in charge of the entire intelligence operation in France) before reverting to Unesco control again with the luckless Kuznetsov, who was expelled after claiming diplomatic immunity.

The Pathé case illustrated the problem facing any host country to a UN agency in this matter. The Soviet Union, like every other United Nations member, has its optimum quota of posts within the system and nominates whom it chooses. Moreover, after it has filled a slot once, it makes sure of that same slot for good by insisting that its nationals are replaced by their own compatriots. This flies in the face of standard UN recruitment policy whereby any vacant post should be open to candidates of any nationality; but, over the years, the world body has just wearily accepted this anomaly by which any Soviet posting becomes a Soviet preserve.

The 13 intelligence agents currently planted in the permanent Soviet delegation to Unesco (which includes, of course, the delegations for Byelorussia and the Ukraine) include some interesting specimens. One, Nikolai Vasilievitch Kirichenko, is himself a Ukrainian with the prime task of penetrating the Ukrainian emigré community in Paris.

Another and far more senior man is Vitali Sergeivich Yudenko, who has the rank of Counsellor and who, in a previous incarnation, operated for seven years from the cover of the Soviet Embassy. Another, Alexei Nikolaivich Kovalski is the son-in-law of the head of the whole KGB "Residentura" in that embassy, Nikolai Tchetverikov. This "happy families" link is repeated with the Head of the Soviet delegation to Unesco, Alexander Sergeivich Piradov, whose father-in-law is the Foreign Minister, Andre Gromyko, though Piradov himself is a regular diplomat. (To be made head of a Soviet UN delegation seems to be a cushy job, often handed by those with powerful protectors in Moscow. In Geneva, for example, the 67-year-old Madame Miranova has hung on to her coveted post as Mission chief for 14 years, and is said to owe this, like her initial appointment, to the fact that in her younger days, she was a close friend of the Soviet Prime Minister, Mr Kosygin. She had nothing directly to do with the KGB; her services to the state were of a different kind.)

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The most flagrant Soviet abuse of the United Nations' network for intelligence purposes lies in the planting of KGB operatives in the various international secretariats themselves. For this reason, the fact that, in Unesco, for example, 10 of the 45 Soviet Secretariat members are full-time agents represents the greatest outrage. These people are supposed to be international civil servants, who have surrendered all allegiances and obligations to their respective countries—having indeed all signed a formal pledge to that effect. There is little doubt that the Director of Planning in Unesco's Secretariat, Kamor Klyoutchnikov, signed that pledge with his tongue fully in his cheek, for he is known as a veteran KGB officer. Other intelligence colleagues of his planted in the Paris Secretariat include two editors, Alexyvich Pavlov and Viktor Golyachkov and two interpreters, Yuri Ivanovich Kritsov and Arkadi Anfilofiev.

The Secretariat jobs which the KGB makes a special beeline for are those which deal with personnel. There are at least three good reasons for this. First, it helps them to get their own nominees into the posts which best serve Soviet interests. Second, it offers the chance to offer promotion prospects as a bribe for support. Third and most important, it gives their operatives access to the confidential files on all UN personnel, revealing any weaknesses which might be exploited. This is particularly valuable as regards the wooing and recruitment of sympathisers in the Third World —a prime target of all KGB operations in the UN, and understandably so. The young Afro-Asian diplomat who serves with the UN today can become Foreign Minister of his country tomorrow.

Moscow's greatest success in this staff field was when the Soviet Union pressured UN General Secretary, Kurt Waldheim (despite strong Western protests) to appoint a known KGB man, Geli Dneprovski, as Head of Personnel in Geneva. That was 18 months ago and, in the intervening time, Dneprovski, while discharging his duties conscientiously enough on the surface, has nonetheless managed to pack into his department three more Soviet officials and one Bulgarian. Another Bulgarian comrade, Valentin Prahov, who is Deputy Head of General Services at Geneva, is responsible for (of all things) security at the Palais des Nations.

Perhaps the most striking proof of the Soviet Union's contemptuous exploitation of the UN is how it controls the UN salaries of its officials. At Geneva, for example, all Soviet officials are forced to hand over some two-thirds of the salary they draw each month in Swiss francs to the accountant at the Soviet Mission. They are then "reimbursed" (either in roubles at home or in local perks) according to the rank they hold in the Soviet Union and not the UN job for which they are appointed and paid. One result is a substantial hard currency income for Moscow. Some of the lower-paid Soviet secretaries have become so incensed with this system (unique in the UN) that they ask for their overtime money in cash to keep it out of the clutches of their accountant.

It is a pity, one feels, that such resistance to Russia's cynical exploitation of the UN does not extend higher up—and outside the harassed ranks of Soviet Missions.